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Atari Online News, Etc.  
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->From the Editor's Keyboard

"Saying it like it is!"

"-----"

Here we are at the end of another week; and it's been another of those weeks from Hades (okay, Hell!). No complaints, no excuses - just the way that it's been. Like for many, life occasionally gets in the way of life!

Until next time...

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - PlayStations Outsold Xboxes 3:1!  
"-----"  
Sega Profits Tumble!  
Why We Dug Atari!  
And much more!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!

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Sony Financials Reveal PlayStations Outsold Xboxes 3:1 in Q1 2014

Sony has released its financial report for the first quarter of the year from April to June 30, revealing games revenue has risen 95.7 percent year-on-year.

The results reveal ¥257.5bn (\$2.5bn) generated in sales from Sony's Games & Network Services division, which the company attributes to the successful launch of the PS4. As a result, last year's first quarter loss of ¥16.4bn (\$164m) has been replaced by an operating profit of ¥4.3bn (\$43m), even though sales of PS3 consoles and games have fallen.

Though Sony doesn't reveal how many PS4 and PS3 consoles were sold separately, the report confirms combined sales to the consumer of 3.5

million units in the first quarter of the year, a big jump from last year's 1.1 million, while sales of PSP, Vita and Vita TV rose to 750,000, up from last year's 600,000. Combined software sales also saw a leap from ¥68bn to ¥85bn.

Microsoft's financial report for the same period was announced last week, revealing combined shipping figures for Xbox One and Xbox 360 sit at 1.1 million, meaning for the first three months of this financial year the PlayStation brand outsold Xbox 3:1.

Sony is forecasting revenues of ¥1,240bn for the Games & Network Services division for the full year, with an operating income of ¥25bn. Full year forecasts for the business as a whole remain unchanged, with the decision to sell the PC business still proving costly. There's an investor call dealing with the results due later today, so we'll update the story as more news is revealed.

#### Sega Profits Tumble Following Lack of Releases

Sega has released its results for the first quarter of the financial year, revealing a profit drop of 57.4 percent.

During the period starting in April and ending June 30 the Japanese-publisher earned ¥88.3 billion (\$858 million) in revenue, which was up slightly on the year before, but saw its net profits fall to ¥5.5 billion with half-year losses expected to come in at ¥7 billion (\$68 million).

The only title released in the quarter was Persona Q: Shadow of the Labyrinth, which only hit the Japanese market and sold 250,000 units. Older titles continued to sell to the tune of 1.7 million units with digital game sales making up around half of the income, but the bulk of the company's revenue came from its Japanese arcade businesses, especially Pachinko and Pachislot, which saw ¥47.5 billion (\$461 million) in revenue and an operating profit of ¥13 billion (\$126 million).

With the year ahead promising Sonic Boom and Alien: Isolation, hopefully the company will manage to turn things around before the year's end.

#### GameStop Locations in Philadelphia Requiring Fingerprint Scans for Trade-Ins

According to a new report by CBS Philadelphia, certain GameStop stores in Philadelphia are requiring customers to provide a fingerprint scan when they go to trade-in their games to the store.

GameStop says they are following local law that allows them to collect thumb prints that go into a secure database called LeadsOnline which will help authorities track down who is selling stolen products.

However, City Solicitor Shelley Smith says the city isn't requiring GameStop to follow this law.

What GameStop does doesn't meet any of the elements of the definition in the code, so the pawnbreaker ordinance doesn't apply to GameStop.

Understandably, people were vocal about this policy, with customers outside a GameStop in Center City saying, I really don't appreciate it. You fingerprinted me like I'm in a police district. No, I'm at a game store and I think it's an overreach. It's going too far.

Following this story coming out, Kotaku spoke with an employee at a GameStop in Philadelphia, where they revealed this measure has been in effect for about a month, following a request from Philadelphia police to implement harsher security measures.

#### An Hour of Video Games a Day Can Be Good for Kids

A new study published Monday in the journal *Pediatrics* finds that playing video games for up to an hour a day can be beneficial for 10- to 15-year-olds.

Electronic gaming and psychosocial adjustment, believed to be the largest study of its kind, was carried out by Oxford University and examined the positive and negative effects of video gaming on a representative sample of 5,000 UK children and teenagers.

It found that a little gaming goes a long way to helping children feel well adjusted, when compared with 10- to 15-year-olds who don't partake of console games at all.

Children who play console or computer games for up to an hour a day were the most likely to express satisfaction with their lives, had the highest levels of sociability, and appeared to have fewer friendship, emotional, or hyperactivity issues than other subjects in the study.

However, there appears to be a tipping point. When children play for three hours or more a day, they are less well adjusted.

The study's author, Dr. Andrew Przybylski, speculates that this could be related to how much of a child's free time is taken up by video gaming. If a child has three to four hours of free time a day and the majority of it is taken up by gaming, then he is missing out on other valuable, enriching activities.

However, whether good or bad, the research suggests that the impact of video games on children is very small when compared with what it describes as the more enduring factors of family life and material deprivation.

These results support recent laboratory-based experiments that have identified the downsides to playing electronic games. However, high levels of video game playing appear to be only weakly linked to children's behavioral problems in the real world. Likewise, the small, positive effects we observed for low levels of play on electronic games do not support the idea that video games on their own can help children develop in an increasingly digital world, said Dr. Przybylski, who believes that more research will now need to be done into understanding what types of games have the biggest positive benefit on children and how other external factors impact childhood and adolescent development.

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->A-ONE Gaming Online

- Online Users Growl & Purr!

"-----"

### Why We Dug Atari

"Punk archaeologists" explain that they went looking for more than just video-game cartridges in a New Mexico landfill.

There we were at a trash dump in New Mexico: archaeologists, a documentary film crew, Alamogordo city representatives, security and safety teams, a French gourmet food truck, a bevy of hundreds of curious onlookers, and reporters and photographers from Reuters, CNET, and other media outlets. Everyone was there to witness the rather unceremonious cracking of a sealed deposit of Atari Inc. s e-waste on April 26, 2014. There were hundreds of old games buried in the landfill, casualties of a collapsing video-game market in the early 1980s and some terrible game-making.

The media outlets BBC, NPR, CNN, NBC, and many others would go on to make the dig an international news item, just interesting enough, just weird enough, just nostalgia-inducing enough, to make the final minutes of broadcasts around the world.

But the stories about the buried games were more complex than the outputs of the media flurry.

The residents of Alamogordo, the town that houses the dump, have their version. The recent attention to their southern New Mexico city validated their first-hand accounts of the actual disposal from September 22 24, 1983. All exhumed remains supplied concrete evidence to quiet those who dismissed the disposal of Atari cartridges and hardware as urban legend.

Game collectors have their story, too. For them, the dig provided the extraordinary opportunity to get to the bottom of the infamous Atari landfill. Nostalgia had its role, playing upon the remembrances of 40-somethings hoping to reclaim a restorative piece of a childhood that Atari helped define.

Searching for them reversed the expectations of a culture that values the past only if it is old and unique.

Then there is the face of the Atari Legend, an Atari 2600 game called E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial, which was subjected to merciless production constraints that resulted in its dubious reputation as the worst game ever. Many (mistakenly) hail the game as Atari s death knell if not the catalyst to the death spiral of the entire North American games industry. The validation of the dumping ground provided them with an authentic grave upon which to dance. The game s creator, Howard Scott Warshaw, attended the dig, which tempered the cynicism and fed a real sentimentality toward the man, the game, and the game s alien. For many, finding the games brought E.T. home.

There were, of course, economic interests as well. The dig was seen by

some as a publicity stunt by the city of Alamogordo to cash in on its happenstance claim to fame and to generate profits by auctioning souvenirs to the highest bidders. And there was the fairground ballyhoo for Xbox Entertainment Studios and Lightbox Entertainment to promote Atari: Game Over (working title), the first in a new documentary series that may also be its last.

It was an extraordinary media blitz to say the least. Much of the frisson came from the dig's presentation as archaeology, but few outlets focused on the actual work we, the archaeologists, did.

And we'd like to explain ourselves.

Here we all are. We're Andrew Reinhard, Richard Rothaus, Raiford Guins, Brett Weber, and William Caraher. We're a collective of Punk Archaeologists. The punk moniker harkens back to the suburban culture of the late 1970s/early 1980s that drove Atari to prosperity while simultaneously declaring a critique of those consumerist and materialist values. And, just as punk resisted any unified identity or agenda, our archaeological team embodied a range of motives, perspectives, and theoretical commitments that made us want to be there when the excavation machinery rumbled to life.

This is why we did what we did a summary of our intentions and reflections on the aftermath.

To Reinhard, the leader of the archaeological team, it felt like a possible mistake, an out-nerding of the nerds to get beyond the velvet rope to see the Holy of Holies. Reinhard and Guins, completely unaware of one another's actions, first reached out to Fuel Entertainment after it had acquired permission to excavate the landfill in June 2013. Their initial contact was motivated by personal research interests in video games, archaeological science, and video game history. Reinhard was ultimately asked to be the lead archaeologist for the project while Guins joined as the team's historian based upon the field research on the landfill conducted for his book, *Game After: A Cultural Study of Video Game Afterlife*. For some, the dig was seen as a tomb raid, but Reinhard wanted to expose the stratigraphy of the landfill and the interplay between domestic trash and the corporate dump of Atari products. As noble or scientific as those goals might have been, the team also operated out of enlightened self-interest: This excavation put archaeology on the global stage, and raised its profile and capital. After so many digger shows, the team sought to document this salvage excavation according to disciplinary standards. We pursued our work under the popular media microscope, distinct from looters in terms of intention, methods, and outcomes.

While generally agreeing on the larger mission, our team members had different expectations about what would be found and how the work would proceed in the brief window allocated by New Mexico safety restrictions. There were also varying concerns about likely tensions between scientific method and documentary filmmaking. The project was largely dependent on the overarching story and schedule of the director even as team member's professional interests and intellectual investments in the histories and archaeology of late capitalism's contemporary past exceeded the subject matter of the documentary.

So why did we, the archaeological team, dig Atari? Rothaus quipped, Why not? The games were not rare, but common. Searching for them reversed the expectations of a culture that values the past only if it is old and

unique. The desert landfill would not provide clean emptiness, but the overwhelming toxic waste of the late 20th century. Instead of a stupidly over-hyped here is why Mayan civilization collapsed! or look, the Santa Maria! or a sunken Mycenean town! we turned our efforts to things that are so common they can be found on eBay for \$1.99. We would shout over the dust storm, value lies in experience, in memory, not just in the object. We would fight fetishist fanboys who forget that context gives these games meaning.

An issue of the Alamogordo Daily News from September 25, 1983 with the headline, Tons of Atari games buried: Dump here utilized found mixed in with the subject of its front-page story.

Why dig? Not to determine if Atari games were really buried in Alamogordo, as so much coverage of the dig has implied. We knew that the games were there. This was a fact largely confirmed by Ricky Jones of Alamogordo, who ransacked the landfill on Thursday, September 22, 1983 before Atari Inc. s products were crushed a few days later. No, rather than confirming a falsely-named urban legend, the Atari excavation offers a unique look into corporate history and end-of-lifecycle for products. Companies tend to hide the locations of disposed surplus and damaged goods. To most people, returned, overproduced, and undersold products just vanish, unnoticed. Last year s models, failed releases, and returns contrast with the hyped sales figures, new advertising, and marketing plugs surrounding new products. Contrary to Atari s long-dead corporate expectations, the publicity for its unsold titles came unwelcomed and enduring. The so-called legend of the Atari dumping just would not die. The company either underestimated or simply never imagined the staying power of a brand in the minds of devotees raised on 1980s careless consumerism.

A combination of enthusiast verve, corporate ambivalence, and rumor-milling tumble-weeded for 30 years, making the process of locating the deposit a fascinating puzzle. Joe Lewandowski, Alamogordo s resident solid waste management expert, obsessed over the this puzzle, working from memory, landscape, and photographs to lock in where the games were actually buried within the landfill.

On April 26, 2014, city staff, contracted labor, and fandom unearthed the physical remains of a multi-national corporation that mismanaged its consumer electronics division, a moment in game history when the executive suits of Warner Communications culture clashed with Silicon Valley creative types accustomed to hot-tub Fridays and flip-flops. From 1976 to 1984, the imaginary entity nostalgically referred to simply as Atari was really Atari Inc. a subsidiary of a multi-billion dollar media empire. The cracking veneer of the North American games industry included a rapid descent from the January 18, 1982 cover headline of Time when video games were blitzing the world to the hushed 1983 convoy of semitrailers depositing the forsaken.

Eventually, a layer of earth covered the trash that covered the games, and they evaporated into myth.

Departing from an otherwise featureless building in El Paso, Atari s products passed through the hands of numerous retailers, consumers, and gamers. Warehouse workers packed them on trucks and retail employees then took them from nondescript boxes of six or 10. Gamers brought them home, opened the cardboard packaging, pressed the hard plastic cartridges into Atari game consoles, and then gripped rubberized joysticks to press their lone red button.

Within a year or so, some games made their way back to the warehouse, others remained unsold on the shelves or storerooms of retailers, and others never boarded trucks.

The most anticipated game of the 1982 holiday season E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial did not perform as expected and was, along with other Atari products, transported to the dump. The retail dispersal was reversed and in 1983 a convoy transported and then transformed Atari products from objects of desire into waste.

Alamogordo's landfill operators then buried the games under concrete and tons of domestic trash with their price stickers, return receipts, and their original packaging intact. Eventually, a layer of earth covered the trash that covered the games, and they evaporated into myth.

Thirty years later, over the course of a weekend of digging and sorting, the games mostly too damaged to function as such were transformed once again into the material record of the past. Properly catalogued, arranged, and conserved, the materials serve as evidence to help document the political economy of games. The extracted, crushed game cartridges and gnarled packages reveal a stage in a product's lifecycle beyond design, consumption, and utility. Brought to the surface, they prove intentional destruction: game software not as revolutionary invention but as discarded stuff along with mounds of plastic bags, bottles, cans, cardboard, newspapers, old Play-Doh, a porn mag, and domestic rubbish.

City staff, locals, eccentrics from across the nation, filmmakers, and archaeologists collectively witnessed the perilous moment when these objects made the leap from abandonment to return. Exceeding the scientific enthusiasm of an earlier generation of archaeological garbologists, the discarded games moved from rubbish to artifacts of study and then on to museum objects evidence of past events preserved in the present, a memento mori. Some of the former trash will appear for sale once again as collectors' items, or become part of museum collections (once the City of Alamogordo offers its gifts), and very possibly molder in a secure storage room of the community of Alamogordo who took possession and responsibility for the games as they came out of the earth.

Participating in the transition of these games from object of consumer desire to museum artifact, we became the archaeologists of these objects' life history.

Our work transgressed the arc that most objects trace as they move from desire to discard. The team's investment in this enterprise was neither to shout eureka nor to myth-bust, but to help ensure that excavated materials live on in cultural institutions, defying consumerist erasure.

The subversive act of resuscitating objects intentionally interred and forgotten draws upon the same punk intellectual tradition that celebrates squatting or repurposed, anachronistic melodies. Punk Archaeologists understand that the reinvention of 1950s pop by 1970s punk bands like the Heartbreakers, the MC5, and the Ramones exemplified the value in objects discarded in favor of newer, better, and faster models. For Caraher, the three-day excavation schedule for a deposit less than four decades old reinforced the ever-accelerating pace of life in late capitalism. Recycling, in a way, and recognizing the value in these discarded objects offers the opportunity to slow the pace of 21st century capitalism by reminding us that our actions can produce value in

objects. Just as we can laugh about our involvement in an excavation funded in part by Microsoft, we can also see our work as undercutting the rapid commodification of experience by moving an object from being cast off to being venerated. Even the most disposable of objects pushed aside by rapidly changing tastes and technologies can become desirable once more, offering a post-ironic critique of our culture of discard.

The sample we processed reveals a broad range of titles, but most importantly it demonstrates that Atari Inc. didn't play favorites. They dumped the lot regardless of any single title's market performance, or lack thereof.

It was not just the processes of bringing objects back to culture's persistent gaze that piqued our professional interests, but also the games themselves: crushed, twisted, deformed, amalgamated, degraded, and even sometimes intact software that escaped the tread of a bulldozer.

Guins in particular wanted to eat his own words. In Game After, he adopted a cynical view on the integrity of the Alamogordo remains, doubting that recognizable artifacts could be retrieved should the landfill ever be excavated. Guins' doubt stemmed from what he learned of the measures the landfill took to discourage scavenging: the crushing of games mixed with waste, dirt, and globs of cement (no smooth layer was ever poured). He imagined ecofact not artifact, mulch not mummies preserved in the anaerobic bowels of the landfill. He was glad to be proved wrong largely because of the desert-dry conditions and lack of waterlogged waste in this particular cell in the landfill. Atari catalogs, manuals, warranties, packaging, controllers, and cartridges were vacuum-sealed and ripe for documenting.

Having such a vast range of legible materials confirmed Ricky Jones' account of his scavenging trip back in 1983: E.T. shared its coffin with many other Atari titles. Also present: Howard Scott Warshaw's more celebrated titles like Yar's Revenge and Raiders of the Lost Ark, both of which sold millions of units. The pallets that arrived at Alamogordo were loaded with games developed by other Atari programmers as well. Also exhumed were Tod Frye's Pac-Man, Rob Fulop's Missile Command, Space Invaders, and Night Driver, Larry Kaplan's Air-Sea Battle, Carla Meninsky's Warlords and Star Raiders, Bob Polaro's Defender, and Warren Robinett's Adventure, along with the creative labor of numerous other programmers. These intentionally abandoned products unearthed on April 26, 2014 had production runs spanning the period from 1977 to 1983, from the launch of the Atari VCS to the games crash.

Many games were recovered in their original shipping packages while thousands of loose cartridges dotted the surface.

The sample we processed reveals a broad range of titles, but most importantly it demonstrates that Atari Inc. didn't play favorites. They dumped the lot regardless of any single title's market performance, or lack thereof. Landfills don't discriminate and they don't lie. They are great levelers. The story of this particular dig and this particular layer is one that no amount of collective nostalgia and E.T. memorabilia can now shroud.

Once one sidesteps nostalgia, other fascinating connections between the dumping of Atari Inc.'s products and U.S. history begin to materialize. Over the last three years, Caraher, Rothaus, and Weber have been working on the North Dakota Man Camp Project, which documents the social and material culture of man camps (temporary labor housing) in North

Dakota's oil boom counties. Spurred by new technology and higher oil prices, the boom has made the state into an economic powerhouse. But at the same time, long-term residents remain haunted by the economic crashes that killed previous booms in this remote and sparsely-populated region. The three found interesting parallels between the ephemeral nature and frenetic pace of extractive industry activity in North Dakota and the surreal experience of the weekend dig.

The historian-cum-social worker of our group, Weber was particularly interested in the media circus, the intersection with frontier settings, and the uniquely American relationship with the boom-bust business cycle. The mystique of the desert was part of the attraction that weekend; after all, it was an X-Files style cliché that filmmakers and archaeologists were in New Mexico searching for buried aliens. But he also considered the American fascination with success, the readiness to denounce failure, and the tempering of both with the love of an underdog.

The Atari boom of the 1970s and 1980s came about as youth culture transitioned from baby-boomers to Gen Xers, from 45s to home computers. There was also the fading excitement about or maybe even a hangover from a Space Age that no longer held the same fascination as the earlier race to the moon, but instead flirted with a less pragmatic, more romanticized and almost maudlin notion of discovering and joining life from elsewhere in the universe. This all came together in the fall of 1982, leavened by the lingering hype of Spielberg's summer blockbuster and proofed by the consumerism of the hotly anticipated Christmas season. Many who unwrapped Christmas gifts during those years clearly remember the magical name Atari.

During that weekend this April, many waited for the resurrection. The filmmakers and their sponsors could create buzz in a way that would not have been possible when the games were originally dumped.

Atari's bust coincided almost simultaneously with the peak of the 1980s recession, when unemployment in the U.S. hit its highest level since the Great Depression: 10.8 percent during the Christmas shopping season of 1982. Like so many boom-era companies before it, Atari Inc. suffered from corporate hubris: Skyrocketing sales fed a sense that they could do no wrong. A frantically compressed production schedule for the E.T. game failed to produce a quality product, and nevertheless overshot the deadline to be included in that year's Sears Christmas Wish Book.

Economic booms, corporate hubris, and fading dreams of the galaxy are insufficient explanations for the excitement at exhuming them in the spring of 2014. There was talk about the 30th anniversary of the dumping of the games, but that date had already come and gone. Maybe the social and economic standing of the aging gamers had more to do with it the young players of 1982 were now old enough to be nostalgic, and wealthy enough to finance an indulgence in fabricated memory. Capital, time, rose-colored memories such resources flowed more freely and widely in the age of social media. The revered Atari had fallen and E.T. became "the worst game ever."

During that weekend in April, many waited for the resurrection. The filmmakers and their sponsors could create buzz in a way that would not have been possible when the games were originally dumped. And it wasn't just those players. The city councilor in Weber reflected on the city of Alamogordo's decision not just to allow this strange excavation but actively to engage with it. He wanted to see how they would try to brand and market trash dug up from thirty feet below their closed landfill.

Economic development is always a tricky puzzle for small cities in sparsely populated areas, and Alamogordo lacks the artsy aura and mountain mystique of Santa Fe. So Weber was curious to see how the city was going to play this.

Like everyone, Weber was curious to see the games, but he also wanted to see the concrete, the liminal space between product and trash, the threshold between the legend and the spoiled treasure. After Ricky Jones and his friends had gone shopping in the open landfill in the Fall of 1983, Atari had allegedly sealed the deal by encasing the layer of games under concrete. In reality, it seems they just puddled enough concrete atop it to discourage the resale of products still stocked on store shelves. The heavy equipment operators working in 2014 did not find a concrete floor that needed to be cracked, no tomb to break into. Instead, there was only limited evidence of concrete (at least in the sampled area), as though Atari had pissed on its product in disgust one last time.

In the media storm that followed the actual dust storm at the dig site, the archaeology was overlooked by most newspapers, wire services, and bloggers. The story was (and will likely remain) that filmmakers had found the games (or, the game, E.T.). A not-untrue statement. But the filmmakers had also engaged archaeologists as scientists, and looking back on the weekend in the desert, one can choose between a cynical or an optimistic view. On the one hand, the filmmakers understood that the excavation offered a genuine, golden opportunity for archaeologists, garbologists, anthropologists, and historians to get a glimpse into a modern landfill, excavating our recent past while watching the audience react to the discovery. Would that hundreds of cheering people be the norm for any moment of discovery as it happens! Cynicism sets in with the view that the team merely served as props in archaeology theater, adding a new dimension to the documentary, a new tension as scoop after scoop of trash was sifted, and ultimately a kind of scientific validation over what was originally tagged by many as a publicity stunt.

Brett Weber and William Caraher documenting E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial games on April 27, 2014.

Talking with the documentary director Zak Penn, along with others associated with the project suggests we might blend these two outlooks together. The documentary earnestly seeks to explore the near-destruction of the gaming industry, focusing on the Atari Dump Site and burial of E.T. as a very real metaphor for its failure. As archaeologists and historians, we treated this event with sincerity while recognizing the project for what it was: entertainment largely produced for gamers and geeks. It was a compromise, but one we made gladly. None of us had ever excavated e-waste, and digging a landfill with archaeological methods is still (and sadly) a once-in-a-lifetime event. We were more than willing to work in front of the cameras for a career day in the field.

Andrew Reinhard documenting various titles and game controllers on April 27, 2014:

In a symbiotic effort, all parties got what they wanted. The archaeologists got to excavate and record the Atari material eventually we will publish our work for both the general public and for the professional archaeological community, opening up our data and images for free use by anyone who remains interested in what we recovered and observed. The filmmakers got the footage they needed for their

documentary. The city enjoyed worldwide attention that weekend. The audience was vindicated when the first games were recovered from the landfill. Fans of Atari rejoiced in their recovered cultural heritage. Ours was a salvage in these many different senses.

We dug Atari because this spectacle provided the necessary means to directly access the contemporary past for purposes of archaeological and historical research. How could we refuse?

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A-ONE's Headline News  
The Latest in Computer Technology News  
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

#### Major Homeland Security Contractor Hacked

A company that performs background checks for the U.S. Department of Homeland Security said Wednesday it was the victim of a cyber attack, adding in a statement that it has all the markings of a state-sponsored attack.

The computer breach at Falls Church, Virginia-based U.S. Investigations Services (USIS) probably involved the theft of personal information about DHS employees, according to the Washington Post, which first reported the story.

DHS said it had suspended all work with the company amid an investigation by the FBI. A multi-agency cyber response team is working with the company to identify the scope of the intrusion, DHS spokesman Peter Boogaard said in a statement.

At this time, our forensic analysis has concluded that some DHS personnel may have been affected, and DHS has notified its entire workforce, out of an abundance of caution, to advise them to monitor their financial accounts for suspicious activity, he said, adding that employees whose data had likely been compromised would be informed.

The Office of Personnel Management had also suspended work with USIS, the Post said, adding that government officials do not believe the breach has affected non-DHS employees.

We are working collaboratively with OPM and DHS to resolve this matter quickly and look forward to resuming service on all our contracts with them as soon as possible, USIS said in the statement on its website.

We will support the authorities in the investigation and any prosecution of those determined to be responsible for this criminal attack, it said.

Experts who have reviewed the facts gathered to date believe it has all the markings of a state-sponsored attack, the company said.

USIS says it is the biggest commercial provider of background

investigations to the federal government, has more than 5,700 employees, and provides services in all U.S. states and territories, as well as abroad.

### Google Using Its Clout To Widen Use of Encryption

Google is wielding the power of its dominant Internet search engine to push more websites into protecting the people using their services.

The move, announced late Wednesday, involves a change in Google's closely guarded formula for determining the rankings of its search results.

Websites that automatically encrypt their services will now be boosted higher in Google Inc.'s recommendation system. For now, encryption will remain a small factor in Google's ranking formula, but the Mountain View, California-based company says it may put greater emphasis on the security measure in the future. It wants to make it tougher for government spies and computer hackers to grab the personal data of unwitting Web surfers.

Users can tell if a website is encrypted if its address begins with "https."

Google beefed up security of its search engine and popular Gmail service after former National Security Agency contractor Edward Snowden revealed that the U.S. government has been vacuuming up personal data. The surveillance programs exploited gaping holes in unencrypted websites.

When websites are encrypted, it's more difficult for interlopers to sweep up data transmitted over unsecured Wi-Fi networks in homes or widely trafficked areas such as airports or stores.

Online security is a hot-button topic amid the Snowden revelations and a series of high-profile hacking attacks that filched credit card numbers, passwords and other personal information. In the most recent scare, online security firm Hold Security this week revealed that it had discovered a gang of Russian hackers have stockpiled more than 1.2 billion passwords stolen from more than 400,000 websites.

Google has a vested interest in making people feel more secure online because the company makes most of its money from ads that are shown next to search results and other Web content. If people were to become leery of Web surfing because of security concerns, it could crimp Google's profits.

Even so, encryption is unlikely to become the most important factor in Google's website-ranking equation. The quality of a website's content and its relevance to a search request remain among the most influential ingredients.

Websites, though, are constantly looking for every edge that they can get to ensure they rank high on Google's search results to give them a better chance of attracting traffic and making money. Google processes about two out of every three search requests in the U.S. and an even higher percentage in Europe, so its rankings can make or break websites.

Encrypting websites will cost their owners extra money, but they could

lose even more if they fall out of Google's favor.

Even if the entire Web becomes encrypted, it still wouldn't be enough to prevent security breaches caused by inadequate protection of the website servers that store credit card numbers, Social Security numbers, passwords and other sensitive data.

#### Yahoo Joins Google in Making E-mails More Secure

Yahoo will work with Google to create a more secure e-mail system by next year.

The announcement came from Yahoo Chief Information Security Officer Alex Stamos at the Black Hat 2014 security conference in Las Vegas. Yan Zhu, who previously worked for the Electronic Frontier Foundation and is an advocate for widespread encryption, tweeted the announcement from the conference, adding that she has joined Yahoo as the first member of a new privacy engineering team to work on e-mail encryption.

This move comes as technology companies are working to safeguard users' data after a year of large-scale security breaches as well as revelations of US electronic spying made last year by former NSA security contractor Edward Snowden.

While encrypted e-mails have long been common to those who take vigilant precautions regarding their online data, they are still mostly unfamiliar to average e-mail users. Encryption works by turning e-mails into a series of unreadable characters unless you have the code to unscramble them. Traditionally, encryption tools have been too difficult for most Internet users to use.

But those days could be over.

In June, Google announced plans for the End-to-End Chrome extension to make e-mails more easily encrypted. Now, Yahoo which typically competes with Google is joining the fray to develop a more user-friendly encryption tool. Both companies have reportedly stated that the tool will be optional for users to activate.

The tool in development will reportedly use a form of PGP encryption, an encryption feature that has been around for a while. In order to use it, both the sender and recipient of the e-mail must have their own encryption key which is used to unscramble the e-mail in question stored on their computer, tablet, or smart phone.

However, an article in The Wall Street Journal brings up the possible legal concerns that could come from encryption services becoming more widespread. Last year, for example, the encrypted e-mail service Lavabit, previously used by Mr. Snowden, went out of business after being compelled by the federal government to turn over the keys to its encryption tools.

But as Ars Technica reports, were encryption to become widely available as a Web browser plug-in, e-mails become encrypted before they're even in transit. This means a company like Yahoo or Google does not actually possess the encryption keys, making it more difficult for government officials to demand that the encryption keys be turned over.

Should a company such as Yahoo face legal issues, Mr. Stamos said the situation would be quite different from that of a company like Lavabit, telling The Wall Street Journal that Yahoo is a "publicly traded multibillion dollar company with an army of lawyers who would love to take this argument all the way to the Supreme Court."

In similar security trends, Facebook announced Thursday it is acquiring the security firm PrivateCore, a company that defends computer servers from malware attacks by scrambling data on memory chips. On Wednesday, Google announced it would begin giving more weight to encrypted websites in its search results, a move designed to push sites to adopt the more secure HTTPS encryption over the more commonly used HTTP. And last week Twitter acquired the password security start-up Mitro.

#### More Than 17,000 Join Privacy Lawsuit Against Facebook

More than 17,000 people have signed up to join an Austrian law student's class action against Facebook over the social media group's alleged violations of its members' privacy, the student said Tuesday.

Max Schrems, 26, appealed last week to a billion Facebook users to join a claim he filed at Vienna's commercial court as part of his campaign.

Under Austrian law, a group of people may transfer their financial claims to a single person in this case, Schrems. Legal proceedings are then effectively run as a class action.

The echo to his appeal has been giant, much more than expected, Schrems said, adding that most people to sign up were from Europe.

The emails and feedback have been really positive, and what is interesting is that many people say finally someone is doing something in this direction, he said.

Schrems is claiming damages of 500 euros (\$670) per user for alleged data violations by Facebook, including aiding the U.S. National Security Agency in running its PRISM program, which mined the personal data of users of Facebook and other Web services.

He is also seeking injunctions under EU data-protection law at the court in data-privacy-friendly Austria.

Some of those joining his cause are donating money, he said. It is good to see that for most people it is not a matter of (getting) money but of advancing the matter, he said.

Schrems, who already has a case involving the social network pending at the European Court of Justice, invited others to join his Vienna court action at [www.fbclaim.com](http://www.fbclaim.com) using their Facebook logins.

Facebook, which has declined comment on the campaign, has come under fire before for allegedly violating data-protection laws.

Most recently, Britain's data watchdog began investigating whether a 2012 experiment on unwitting users, in which it tried to alter their emotional state to see if their postings turned more positive or negative.

The world's biggest social network, Facebook now has 1.32 billion users. It posted a 61 percent increase in sales in the second quarter, buoyed by mobile advertising, sending its shares to a record high and valuing the company at almost \$200 billion.

### Fury in Russia Over New Wi-Fi Curbs

A new government decree requiring Russians to provide their passport details when logging on to public Wi-Fi networks had Internet users up in arms on Friday.

The decree amends an existing law with a new clause that says "providing communication services on data transfer and Internet connection will be done by the operator... after user identification."

The Wi-Fi connection provider would have to collect the user's full name and passport information, and would have to store the data for six months, along with details of how long the person was logged on, according to the decree.

The regulation is the latest blow to Russian Internet users, with opponents of President Vladimir Putin denouncing it as yet another attempt to control even the tiniest dissent.

"This is as bad as it sounds and even slightly worse," Russian protest leader Alexei Navalny wrote on his blog.

"Before our eyes a real "big brother" is being created... a system that knows who wrote what, where, and from what device," he said.

Contradictory explanations from various officials surfaced after the criticism, with the Moscow city government saying the measure would only effect Internet zones in Russia's post offices.

The communications ministry said the measure was a part of Russia's crackdown on terrorism, and that private Wi-Fi networks established by individuals would not be affected.

"If the Wi-Fi network is established by a communications operator, he has to ask the user to provide ID data via a text message or a special form before providing access," the ministry said in a statement.

But the operator could also get the information by "enquiring with the relevant authorities," it said, without elaborating.

Communications Minister Nikolai Nikiforov, writing on his Twitter account, said the restrictions would be in line with global practice.

"User identification (via bank card, mobile number, etc) when accessing a public Wi-Fi is a world practice," he wrote.

Apple and Samsung said in a joint statement today that they have agreed to drop all suits against each other in countries outside the U.S. Claims are being abandoned in Australia, Japan, South Korea, Germany, Netherlands, the U.K., France and Italy. Zeb Eckert has more on "Asia Edge."

Apple Inc. and Samsung Electronics Co. are starting to wind down their global patent battle.

The companies said in a joint statement today that they have agreed to drop all suits against each other in countries outside the U.S. Claims are being abandoned in Australia, Japan, South Korea, Germany, Netherlands, the U.K., France and Italy.

The agreement shows Apple and Samsung may be nearing a conclusion to what has been a drawn-out and occasionally nasty worldwide patent fight, which has sprouted alongside the booming market for touch-screen smartphones. Apple has accused Samsung of copying its iPhone designs, while Samsung has countered that Apple is using pieces of its wireless-transmission technology without permission. Neither side won an overarching decision harming the other's sales, and judges repeatedly urged the companies to settle rather than play out their dispute in court.

There had already been signs of de-escalation prior to today's announcement. Apple and Samsung agreed in June to drop their appeals of a patent-infringement case at the U.S. International Trade Commission that resulted in an import ban on some older Samsung phones. Apple and Google Inc., which makes the Android mobile operating system that Samsung uses in many of its handsets, also announced a deal in May to drop lawsuits against one another related to Motorola Mobility.

Still, they said in the statement that they aren't ending the legal battles completely, nor have they reached any cross-licensing agreement. Samsung shares fell in Seoul.

Apple and Samsung have agreed to drop all litigation between the two companies outside the United States, the companies said in the statement. This agreement does not involve any licensing arrangements, and the companies are continuing to pursue the existing cases in U.S. courts.

Michael Risch, a law professor at Villanova University in Pennsylvania, said in an e-mail that the deal shows how Apple and Samsung see their mixed worldwide results as not worth the effort. Yet he cautioned that since there is no cross-licensing agreement, the companies may just be taking a breather before the next skirmish begins.

The U.S. continues to be a legal battleground, Risch added, as the smartphone market shares for Apple and Samsung shift. Chinese makers Huawei Technologies Co. and Lenovo Group Ltd. are gaining ground globally by offering feature-packed phones at lower prices.

The patent fights grew out of the surging sales for smartphones. After Cupertino, California-based Apple introduced the iPhone in 2007, popularizing the use of phones with touch screens and Internet access, Samsung followed suit with a wave of models with different styles and prices.

The rivalry sparked two protracted patent-infringement cases in federal court in San Jose, California. Apple scored victories in the two

California suits, including a \$930 million verdict in 2012 and a \$120 million result earlier this year.

The hearings unveiled a trove of internal company documents on both sides, including e-mails showing Samsung's urgency to quickly get a smartphone on the market to match Apple's iPhone, and notes from Apple executives complaining about the effect of Samsung's advertising on the iPhone.

Apple Chief Executive Officer Tim Cook, Samsung mobile chief Shin Jong-Kyun and other executives from both companies attended a full-day session with a mediator in the first week of February, and representatives from both sides had several follow-up phone calls with the mediator, according to a report the companies filed that month. Other sessions in 2012 and 2011 also failed to generate a deal.

The settlement comes as Samsung grapples with declining demand for its smartphones and slumping earnings. Its global market share declined 7.4 percentage points last quarter from a year earlier, and the company lost the top spots in key markets China and India.

Samsung last week also posted its smallest quarterly profit in two years, with its China shipments dropping 15 percent.

The whole industry paradigm is changing, Lee Seung Woo, an analyst at IBK Securities Co. in Seoul, said by phone. Apple and Samsung have no time to waste and it's time to get back to work.

Complicating the legal spat has been that Apple and Samsung are close business partners, with Suwon, South Korea-based Samsung providing critical components like semiconductors and memory chips for Apple's mobile devices.

The world's top two smartphone makers have spent hundreds of millions of dollars in legal fees on battles across four continents to dominate a market that was valued at \$338.3 billion last year, according to IDC. Samsung controlled about 31 percent of the global market last year, compared with Apple's 15 percent, the market researcher said.

#### Top Code Slingers Converge on DEF CON

You may have heard of ComicCon, but in an era where cyber reigns you should know about DEF CON.

The best code slingers in the world are hitting Las Vegas this week for the 22nd annual largest and longest-running hacking conference.

More than 10,000 people are participating in the intense four-day event, which kicked off at the Rio Hotel. The greatest hackers converge for briefings, competitions, networking and a whole lot of fun.

If you want to catch up on the latest hacks, new vulnerabilities and get up to speed on computer bug bounties then this is the place to be.

Given that creative minds often excel at pranking, organizers at the DEF CON and Black Hat conferences send tips to journalists in advance to help them avoid cyber pitfalls.

For example, attendees are encouraged to take steps to safeguard hotel room keycards since devices may be circulating that can copy your key from a distance.

ATMs and Wi-Fi networks in the vicinity also warrant caution and using gifts, like seemingly innocent-looking USB drives, might not be the best idea.

This year the extremely reclusive John McAfee, founder of the McAfee antivirus software company, is the surprise keynote speaker.

I believe that the world needs the collective talents of these individuals now more than ever, he said. Our fundamental right to privacy is being eroded at an alarming rate by invasive and misappropriated technology, and as privacy is diminished, so are our freedoms. We must take a stand now and join forces, or I fear this erroneous turn will soon become irreversible.

DEF CON is home to cutting edge briefings, but it is also the setting for competition on an epic scale.

There are fun, light-hearted, contests like the DEF CON Beard & Moustache Competition and there are ones that reflect the compassion of participants like the Be The Match Foundation Bone Marrow Drive.

There are also lots of other contests and games away from the keyboard like the self-explanatory "Beverage" Cooling Contraption Contest (BCCC) and the lock-picking contest Black Bag.

Jeff Moss, DEF CON's founder, who is also known as The Dark Tangent, has introduced the Tamper Evident Village that challenges participants to defuse a bomb. It's described as Bring your own tools, have an action hero moment for yourself.

A long running and popular tradition at DEF CON is playing the "spot the fed" game. DEF CON also attracts government employees from the likes of the FBI and NSA, as well as police officers. Attendees try to spot the feds who are trying to blend in.

In the past, The Dark Tangent asked the NSA and other government agencies not to attend in any official capacity.

His blog posted a statement on the subject entitled "Feds, We Need Some Time Apart." It has been more than a year since the infamous Edward Snowden leaks kicked off, but it is too early to tell if the reception to government employees at DEF CON will be any warmer this time round.

The "wall of sheep" is another recurring game at the conference. For those who failed to heed the friendly heads-up to be careful, the partial names and passwords of attendees who connected to the unsecured Wi-Fi network are displayed on the wall as a fun gentle warning to learn to think before you type.

In addition to the large scale partying, there are also events like movie night. Tonight The Signal, a story about hackers on a road trip to DEF CON, is being shown.

Hackers also battle for supremacy in a number of hard-core contests that pit the very best against the very best.

Capture the Flag is an annual fixture and the competition is so fierce that some spend competitors spend the duration of the conference working on winning the prestigious title.

Another event this year is the wittily-entitled SOHOplessly Broken. Despite plenty of research indicating that SOHO (small office/home office) devices are highly vulnerable to attack, manufacturers have failed to respond to calls to better protect users.

In the first part of the contest, hackers devise their own vulnerabilities that could be applied to routers, internal networking hardware, and mobile Wi-Fi hotspots. The second part is a sort of relay race where two teams race to crack a series of routers.

Competitions like these have been invaluable in identifying vulnerabilities. And when top talent crack these tough puzzles, it can spell good news for the Average Joes lacking elite cyber skills.

#### AOL Still Tricks Millions of Subscribers Into Keeping Their Dial-up Subscription

While more and more carriers and Internet service providers are looking at ways of increasing data speeds, some people are still stuck on dial-up service, or at least they're paying for it even though they might not really need it. AOL has no less than 2.34 million dial-up subscribers left, Re/code reports, who pay just over \$20 per month for dial-up Internet access, even though many of them may already get their Internet fix from somewhere else.

AOL's dialup business might finally, finally die in 5 years. The number of subscribers has dropped significantly from 2011, when AOL had 3.62 million subscribers paying \$18 a month for the service, but the company still has a huge chunk of customers, which it charges an average of \$20.86 per month right now.

The company managed to beat Wall Street's Q2 revenue and profit numbers, with a large lump of its money coming from these faithful dial-up subscribers who don't mind paying \$20 a month for a service they might not even be using anymore.

Tim Armstrong's company says its subscription business generated \$143 million in Adjusted OIBDA — its proxy for operating income — last quarter, Re/code writes. That's more than the \$121 million in Adjusted OIBDA that the entire company generated.

#### The State With The Fastest Internet Speed Is Down South

Virginia was ranked the top state for fastest Internet speed in the U.S., according to Broadview Networks. Other top states included those along the east coast, such as Delaware, Massachusetts and Rhode Island.

The days of slow dial-up speeds are fast behind us, but if you are still impatiently waiting for your videos to stream, moving down south is your

best bet. According to a map created by the communications and cloud service Broadview Networks, Virginia has the country's fastest Internet service.

Virginia's Internet speed has an average of 13.7 megabits per second (Mbps) based on data from Akami's "State of the Internet" report published in June. States were ranked as being "high broadband" locations if it had an average speed higher than 10 Mbps. "Low broadband" states were categorized as having speeds lower than 4 Mbps.

26 states in total met the high broadband requirements. While Virginia was the top ranked state for speed, Alaska ranked the slowest speed with 7 Mbps. Other slow Southern states included Kentucky, Montana and Arkansas with an average of 7.3 Mbps.

Northeast states - excluding Maine - all show to have fast Internet speeds. Delaware and Massachusetts tied as the second fastest states with 13.1 Mbps. Rhode Island with 12.9 Mbps and Washington D.C. with 12.9 Mbps followed.

The U.S. as a whole has an average of 10.5 Mbps, ranking number 10 when compared to other countries. South Korea took home the honor of fastest Internet speed with an average of 23.6 Mbps.

Fast Internet speed is essential when streaming videos online. Communications company Level 3 has accused unnamed internet service providers for slowing down its broadband access on purpose in the past. Level 3 is known for helping connect providers such as AT&T and Comcast Corporation.

Netflix has also complained that Comcast and Verizon slowed down streaming so that the company would have to pay more for efficient delivery of their videos. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) banned Internet service providers from blocking websites or charging companies more for content streaming.

Netflix has its own Internet speed index for service providers. Netflix ranks Cablevision Optimum as the highest speed in the U.S. with 3.10 Mbps and Verizon DSL the lowest with 0.91 Mbps.

#### Follow These 4 Easy Steps To Toughen Up Your Passwords

1. Get a good password manager.?The best passwords are long strings of letters, numbers, and symbols that you can't remember. So you'll need a tool to keep track of them ideally, one you can access from any device. Look for a product that not only stores passwords but also generates them for you. I like 1Password, which works well on Mac OS, Windows, iOS, and Android.

2. Perform a password audit.?Import all your existing passwords into your password manager (you probably have more than you realize stored in your browser). Now for the audit. Search for reused passwords first; these are your biggest security risk. Eliminate every instance of repetition. Then search for schemes (like 1234Facebook or 1234Google). A savvy hacker or cracking program will get past those in seconds. Finally, sort your passwords by strength and change the weak ones.

3. Search your email.?Your inbox is a treasure trove of passwords. An easy solution: Do a simple search for password and delete all the results. Also search for login and username. This way, if someone does get into your email, he ll have a harder time finding all your accounts.

4. Wall off critical accounts.?Your bank, email, online investing, cell phone, Internet service, and data storage accounts are critical. Take extra steps to protect these. If you haven t already done so, set up two-step verification for such accounts. Two-step login requires an additional code that s sent to your phone (the code changes each time). If your bank doesn t offer two-step verification, change to one that does.

### Microsoft s Newest Surface Lap-Tablets Go on Sale

A little more than two months after its unveiling, Microsoft s Surface Pro 3 is finally available for purchase in all its forms. The latest editions of the tablet include the base model, which sells for \$799, and a more high-end version, with a faster processor and more storage, that sells for \$1,949.

Available at retailers including the Microsoft Store, Best Buy, and Walmart, as well as online stores including TigerDirect.com, the Surface Pro 3 is Microsoft s third attempt at creating a tablet that can double as a laptop for business and power users.

The tablet itself features a super-sharp 12-inch touchscreen and measures a svelte 0.36 inches thick, slightly thinner than a 13-inch MacBook Air laptop.

The Surface Pro 3 s standout feature, beyond its ability to run all Windows-compatible programs, is its built-in adjustable kickstand that lets you stand the tablet up on a desk like a laptop or lay it flat like a tablet.

In terms of specifics, the \$799 version of the Surface Pro 3 gets an Intel Core i3 processor and 64 GB of storage. The more expensive model, on the other hand, gets a more powerful Intel Core i7 processor and a whopping 512 GB storage drive.

That s more than enough space for all your work files, not to mention a few full-length movies to watch during those long business trips.

A midrange \$999 Surface Pro 3, which features a Core i5 chip and 128 GB drive, has been on sale since late June.

Though Microsoft markets the Surface Pro 3 as a tablet that can replace your laptop, the slate doesn t come with a physical keyboard. Instead, you ll have to shell out an additional \$129 for a Surface Pro Type Cover, which features a keyboard and touchpad and doubles as a cover, hence the name.

A stylus is also available for the Pro 3, though that will cost you another \$49.99.

## IBM Envisions A Brainy Internet of Things with New Chip

In keeping with IBM's old motto, the IT giant hopes to lay the groundwork for an Internet of Things (IoT) that "thinks." On Aug. 7, the company unveiled its largest chip ever, which contains 5.4 billion transistors and features an architecture that is inspired by the way the human brain processes information.

A product of the DARPA-funded Systems of Neuromorphic Adaptive Plastic Scalable Electronics (SyNAPSE) project, the "fully functional and production-scale chip" features 256 million programmable synapses, 1 million programmable neurons and 4,096 neurosynaptic cores. It is capable of performing 46 billion synaptic operations per second per watt.

By comparison, the single-core prototype developed in 2011 had just 262,144 programmable synapses and 256 programmable neurons.

Despite its capabilities and size - IBM describes the second-generation SyNAPSE chip "as one of the largest CMOS chips ever built" - it sips power. According to the company, "it consumes a minuscule 70mW orders of magnitude less power than a modern microprocessor."

The brain-like chip is built using Samsung's 28nm chip making process, which incorporates dense on-chip memory and low-leakage transistors. Power savings are achieved, in part, by the chip's event-driven architectures, which draws power only when it needs to, unlike traditional chips which consume electricity even at idle.

Shawn Han, vice president of Foundry Marketing for Samsung Electronics, said in a statement the project leveraged "a process traditionally used for commercially available, low-power mobile devices to deliver a chip that emulates the human brain by processing extreme amounts of sensory information with very little power." He called the chip a "huge architectural breakthrough that is essential as the industry moves toward the next-generation cloud and big-data processing."

According to Dr. Dharmendra S. Modha, Chief Scientist of IBM Research's Brain-Inspired Computing unit, his company "has broken new ground in the field of brain-inspired computers, in terms of a radically new architecture, unprecedented scale, unparalleled power/area/speed efficiency, boundless scalability."

The innovation could help pave the way for smarter, more aware IoT systems and mobile devices. "These brain-inspired chips could transform mobility, via sensory and intelligent applications that can fit in the palm of your hand but without the need for Wi-Fi," added Dr. Modha.

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